

Eager Anticipation

Did you know that the story of Joseph of Arimathea that Harriet just read for us is in all four gospels? He shows up in all 4 accounts - and yet I know I have never preached on him and I am fairly certain I have never heard a sermon focused on him - even though we read this passage every single year. But because we read it during Good Friday and Easter - we often focus on Jesus' death and then the morning of his resurrection - which loses this beautiful story that I have so loved diving into over the last few weeks. When we shift our focus to Joseph in this crucifixion story - there are all sorts of tender and awe-inspiring details for us to note together.

First - Joseph was on the council. He was a leader in the Jewish hierarchy - he was a part of the conversations that those in power were having about Jesus and the problems he was causing as his followers grew in number and in expectation. And Joseph was not in favor of the plan to have Jesus handed over to the Roman authorities. Presumably he voiced his concerns to the group - but was unable to convince them to do things differently. He tried to stop what he knew was wrong, but ultimately could not.

When the council moved ahead with destructive plans - Joseph did not respond by vilifying them to everyone who would listen. He did not sink into despair about what he hadn't been able to do. He remembered that he had power - and could still use it. He cannot do everything - but he focuses on the thing he CAN do - and puts his energy there.

Joseph cared for Jesus' body. Perhaps at risk physically, but certainly politically risky to himself, he goes and asks permission to bury Jesus' body according to Jewish custom. Jesus' body is incredibly vulnerable. Typically the bodies of those crucified are left out to be scavenged by animals - as a gruesome lesson to anyone thinking of treason. Best case scenario would be that Jesus' body is tossed into a mass grave for prisoners. But Joseph has the power to do something else - and he does.

This act is immensely demanding - physically and mentally. A body is literally dead weight - and he lifts it - he tenderly washes it, prepares it, wraps it. Joseph would have become dirty in the process - and also ritually unclean by touching Jesus. And yet he does. He cares for a vulnerable Jesus - placing him in a tomb with dignity.

And Joseph does this in the midst of one of the worst days of his life. Jesus has died - so much around him looks hopeless. He is grieving - grieving the loss of Jesus - perhaps grieving for the people on the Jewish council with whom he was close and who have let him down. In this moment filled with despair and helplessness - Joseph chooses to do the next right thing.

Joseph simply does the next right thing that is within his power to do.

We live in a world where the enormity of the need around us can be overwhelming. There are vulnerable bodies all around. Real people, children of God, in need of our compassion - our tender care. In need of our love - in need of belonging.

And for our own wholeness - as well as theirs - we must find ways to reach out - to share together in love - to learn and grow - to listen deeply - to live toward a more just, equitable, brave, merciful world. A world more closely aligned with the kin-dom of God.

The scripture says that Joseph was a good man - who eagerly anticipated the Kingdom of God. He actively hoped for a time when things were better - more fair - more just for all people. More full of compassion and love. This hope wasn't passive. It wasn't wishful thinking. It was something he was willing to risk himself for. Willing to get his hands dirty for. Willing to be and do - even when all looked useless and impossible.

As we continue to grow into and live into our welcome statement - because that work is ongoing and we must never forget that - so as we continue - it is this posture that I want to invite us to: Eager anticipation of the kin-dom of God. A strong desire and hope that acts. Risk-taking love - for the sake of the vulnerable - but also for our own sake- because we know that we become better - more whole - more faithful- by living with compassion and love for all of God's children.

Eager anticipation of God's kingdom - trusting that even when we cannot do everything - we CAN do something to partner with God in the ongoing work of liberation and justice and mercy for all. Eager anticipation - hope that acts. May we make it so....

Let's join together in dedicating this welcome quilt and commitment to continuing to live into and beyond the word of our statement. As our leaders make their way forward - will you stand as a symbol of your active hope and join in reading our litany....